

Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice

Helping architecture to become a more equitable and flexible profession; one that offers opportunity for all and is well positioned to meet contemporary challenges.



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01. Pay equity:

Equal pay for equal work has been enshrined in Australian law since 1969. Despite this – and despite the best intentions of many – gender-based pay gaps still occur in architecture, as in most industries.

This guide offers simple suggestions to assist practices in evaluating, establishing and maintaining pay equity, and to help employees seeking to achieve gender pay equity. It also makes suggestions as to how the profession as a whole can assist in addressing the issue.



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02. Long-hours culture:

Long working hours are a huge issue in architecture. A culture of long hours is damaging to individual architects, to businesses, to the architect's professional standing and to the viability of the profession. It has major negative effects on those with commitments outside the workplace, and impacts particularly severely on women's careers. Although there are surprisingly few resources available and the issue can seem inevitable and intractable, there are also good examples of practices that don't fall into this pattern.

This guide challenges long-hours cultures in architecture. It examines the complex factors behind it and offers suggestions about how to manage workload and workplace culture for the benefit of all.



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03. Part-time work:

Meaningful part-time work in architecture is essential to workplace equity. It allows employees to balance life and work demands – to be challenged and fulfilled at work, while also devoting adequate time and energy to family life or external activities. It also ensures practices retain key talent, experience and professional knowledge.

If the industry is to achieve true gender equity, serious part-time work needs to be a more available and acceptable career option for everyone.

This guide outlines the benefits to practices and employees and offers strategies for creating and promoting meaningful part-time work.



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04. Flexibility:

Flexible work practices are becoming increasingly common in architecture. Some architects already enjoy the benefits of flexible schedules or working from home. In architecture the challenge is less to encourage the adoption of flexible work patterns, and more to overcome their often-unspoken career costs. For example, returning to part-time work after parental leave is often considered a career killer, and this inevitably impacts disproportionately on women.

This guide looks at some of the benefits of working flexibly in architecture and identifies strategies to help these arrangements run smoothly.



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05. Recruitment:

Equitable recruitment is an important place to start building an equitable practice and profession. Recruitment processes in architectural practices range from very casual to tightly managed. Whatever the process used, recruitment needs to be done well to ensure that the practice attracts and keeps the best people, and that all applicants have equal opportunity. Satisfied employees, high levels of performance and competitive strength are just some of the rewards for practices that handle recruitment well.

This guide provides advice on fair and equitable recruitment strategies and processes for both employers and employees. It includes material for those starting out in their career and those at more senior levels.



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06. Career progression:

Every career is different. It's often more than a single, rising trajectory – it can involve pauses, shifts in intensity and different types of work over a lifetime. There is more than one career model and different models suit different people and life stages. Research indicates that women are more likely to have complex 'non-standard' careers and to experience delayed career progression.

This guide looks at how careers might be considered and navigated. It offers suggestions for supporting women's professional development and career progression. This includes supporting women with 'traditional' architectural careers in private practice, and those with more complex 'flexible' careers.



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07. Negotiation:

Good negotiation skills play a big role in the development of individual careers, in the strength of successful practices and in the continuing viability of the profession as architecture renegotiates its cultural, social and political role. Research in other fields consistently demonstrates that gender can impact negotiation styles, outcomes and even the willingness to negotiate in the first place.

This guide outlines the importance of negotiation skills in architecture. It offers advice to employers and employees about negotiating in ways that provide a fairer playing field for women and men, and are beneficial to all parties.



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08. Career break:

Career breaks are common in architecture and many people take one or more breaks over the course of their career. The reasons are diverse and include caring for children or other family members, further study, travel, an occupational side step, or an enforced break due to redundancy or illness. Some of these are seen as career advancing, while others are perceived 'career killers'. Whatever the reason for the break, it needs to be carefully managed.

This guide assists employees and practices to collaboratively plan for and manage career breaks, particularly parental leave, and to support a successful return to work life, particularly for women.



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09. Leadership:

We need the best people to lead the profession (women and men) at both practice and industry levels. Women are significantly underrepresented at the senior levels of architectural practices and in leadership roles in the profession. Yet substantial research shows that companies and organisations with diverse leadership groups consistently outperform those without. The ethical and business cases for gender-diverse leadership are abundantly clear – architecture needs to catch up.

This guide addresses the obstacles women may face in attaining seniority, offers women tips on positioning themselves for leadership roles, provides guidance on promoting and supporting women, and outlines the role leaders in the profession can play in facilitating change.



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10. Mentoring:

Mentoring is a critical tool for retaining women in architecture, developing their careers and assisting women returning to work after career breaks. Mentoring relationships can be useful and inspirational. They deliver valuable learning experiences and diverse support and advice to the mentee. They also provide value for the mentor who shares experience and skills and gains insight into the concerns and experiences of younger architects.

This guide outlines the benefits of mentoring programs and relationships, and includes strategies for building their effectiveness.



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11. Registration:

Only 21% of registered architects are women. This is despite women having comprised approximately 40% of architecture graduates in Australia for three decades.

Encouraging, supporting and mentoring those women who choose to register is a symbolic and practical contribution to gender equity in the profession.

This guide outlines the obstacles that women may face, and strategies to manage them, and provides advice about supporting women who wish to register as architects.



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